

**Reported Early Syphilis Infections in Kansas
Between
01-01-2003 and 12-31-2003**

Kansas Department of Health and Environment
Bureau of Epidemiology and Disease Prevention

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The Kansas City area (Wyandotte and Johnson counties) became the focus of early syphilis control and prevention in late 2002. In the last three months of 2002, Wyandotte and Johnson Counties reported seven cases of early syphilis. This trend continued into 2003 with 30 early syphilis cases reported from January to December 2003 in these counties. The outbreak was associated with illicit drug use, usually methamphetamine/crack cocaine, and sex for drugs and/or money.

Of the 37 reported early cases of syphilis reported in 2003, 21 were reported in Wyandotte County and another nine were reported in Johnson County. All but two of the cases in the Kansas City area were associated with illicit drugs and/or prostitution. Seventeen of the 30 early syphilis cases in the Kansas City area in 2003 were diagnosed as primary and secondary syphilis. The syphilis activity in Wyandotte County has increased because of the increased interaction between the prostitutes on a major thoroughfare in Kansas City, KS and male Hispanic immigrants. The population of immigrants with Hispanic ethnicity has increased greatly over the last couple of years in Kansas City, KS. This area in Kansas City, KS has a long history of low levels of syphilis endemicity. The area has been a center for both drugs and sex for drugs/money and it is located along exits of a major interstate, I-70. The Johnson County cluster of syphilis cases probably originated from sexual contact on the major thoroughfare in Kansas City, KS (interviews have demonstrated linkages). The Johnson County cluster had relatively dense sexual networks with crack cocaine use being a major cofactor. There is no previous history of syphilis in this sub-population. There are indications that the intense syphilis interventions have had an impact on this sexual network. Since May of 2003 only two early syphilis cases have been reported in Johnson County.

Early syphilis in Wyandotte County is a major concern for future morbidity. Several steps were taken to ensure long term prevention and surveillance of syphilis in this area. Program staff met with Wyandotte County Jail personnel and it was determined that the nurses will identify higher risk inmates for referral to DIS for counseling and syphilis/HIV testing. A proposal was introduced to make blood draw for syphilis and HIV part of the routine for all admissions where sex or drugs are involved. Program staff met with representatives of Veronica's Voice, a community group advocating for prostitutes and recovering prostitutes, to discuss plans for jail screening and outreach to this population. Program staff met with representatives of the Rainbow Center (a large grassroots center for Hispanic activity). The Rainbow Center sponsors Sunday swap fairs and a dance hall for Friday and Saturday night dances. They agreed to let DIS hang posters on property and to provide handouts in Spanish to their patrons.

Seven of the total 37 early syphilis cases in Kansas in 2003 were in three counties. Sedgwick County had a total of five cases; of which two were secondary and three were early latent. Douglas and Miami counties each had one case.

Whites accounted for 51 percent (19 cases) of the reported early syphilis cases in Kansas in 2003. African-Americans and Hispanics accounted for 30 percent (11 cases) and 19 percent (7 cases) of reported early syphilis cases respectively in 2003. Six of the 7 Hispanic cases were located in Wyandotte County. Minorities in Kansas may be disproportionately represented due to reporting bias (e.g., African-Americans may use public STD and family planning clinics more often for health care and be more likely to be screened and reported if positive).

The male to female ratio of the 37 early syphilis cases in Kansas for 2003 was (19/18) 1:0.9. Three male cases named only male sex partners (MSM). All three MSMs identified social networks outside of Kansas. The median age of an individual infected with early syphilis was 28 years of age and the age range was 18 to 49 years of age. Forty-nine percent (18) of the early syphilis cases were diagnosed through private providers.

There was one presumptive congenital syphilis case reported in Wyandotte County in 2003. The mother did receive prenatal care, and tested negative for syphilis in her first trimester. She was not retested during pregnancy, but tested positive and was treated after delivery. The infant had no signs or symptoms of congenital syphilis, but was presumptively treated. There was no congenital cases reported in Kansas in 2002.